



## **Rotary's contribution towards India's Polio-free certification**

Rotary's flagship project – the only initiative supported by all Rotary clubs worldwide – is the global eradication of polio. Rotary launched the first global effort to immunize all the world's children against polio in 1985.

In 1988, Rotary persuaded the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and CDC to join the effort and together the four organizations formed the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI). The effort has since also been joined by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

As a founding partner of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, Rotary has been a key driver behind efforts to eradicate polio in India and worldwide. Fully eradicating polio in India, once considered the most challenging country to bring to zero cases, remains one of the greatest accomplishments of the GPEI's 30-year history and is a historic global health milestone. India will complete six years of polio-free certification in March 2020.

Through the Rotary International's India PolioPlus Committee (INPPC), Rotary members across India became actively involved in Polio Eradication efforts in their respective states. Rotary volunteers in India were the grassroots agents of change in the movement, who through their unwavering commitment, helped in overcoming cultural, geographical and socio-political challenges to reach every community with the vaccine.

Successfully gaining access to children who have never been reached before was an integral component of Rotary PolioPlus commitment. The INPPC focused actively on social mobilization; political, bureaucratic and religious advocacy; fundraising, volunteer recruitment and awareness-building to make Polio immunization widely acceptable in India. Rotary members were innovative in supporting polio surveillance activities and ensuring high quality immunization campaigns that included five core elements: advocacy, health camps, permanent transit posts, permanent immunization centers, and Rotary polio resource centers. They were the building blocks of Rotary's concerted effort to interrupt transmission of the virus.

### **Key milestones: A timeline**

- As recently as 2009, India constituted over 60% of all global polio cases. 172 million children had to be vaccinated twice each year. Enteric diseases and other health issues plagued the country, along with other obstacles like insanitary living conditions, impure drinking water, and malnourishment. Implementing the social mobilization network, finger marking, newborn tracking and mapping missed children, under the leadership of government helped Rotary contribute significantly in this fight against Polio.
- Rotary volunteers in India have helped organize national immunization days, staffed health stations and given drops to children. In addition to their own record-breaking financial contribution for polio eradication besides countless volunteer man-hours, Rotarians have helped leverage a further US \$ 6.7 billion from the governments the world over for this cause.

- India has 1.49,782 lakh members through around 3806 Rotary clubs dedicated to ending Polio in the country.
- So far in India Rotary's India National PolioPlus Committee (INPPC) has actively been involved in Social Mobilization, media management, and political, bureaucratic and religious advocacy to make Polio immunization widely acceptable. Successfully gaining access to children who have never been reached before is an integral component of Rotary PolioPlus commitment. Consequent to the sustained advocacy efforts of Rotary's India National PolioPlus Committee, and the central government's leadership, India implemented supplementary immunization activity as National Immunization Days (NID) in 1995. Followed by regular two annual NIDs, and few Sub-NIDs wherever required. INPPC has garnered political support for the program by involving the President, the Prime Minister, Chief Ministers, Health Ministers and local politicians in the program.
- Rotary also enlisted bureaucratic support by involving the Cabinet Secretary, the Chief Secretary, the Principal Secretary, District Magistrates and other health officials in the polio campaign. Rotary approached senior minority leaders such as the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid and the President of All India Muslim Personal Law Board and was successful in enlisting their support. Further INPPC formed a Rotary Muslim Ulema Committee in the state of U.P, comprising of senior Muslim scholars and religious leaders to address issues of resistance amongst Muslim population and appeal to Muslim parents to immunize children against Polio. Today this Ulema Committee that Rotary helped set up in the State is a vital resource that the U.P. Govt. and other social organizations seek intervention from time to time for their ongoing programs to bring about an overall improvement in the social-economic life of the minority community.
- INPPC's Polio Corrective Surgery and Rehabilitation Camps for the polio-affected children is one of the finest examples of its commitment towards polio eradication and the overall welfare of the children. So far nearly 7000 polio-inflicted children have been operated upon and rehabilitated through 82 camps held in different endemic states of the country. Similarly, free health camps are being organized by Rotary in different districts to cater to the urgent health needs of the people including Polio immunization.
- Apart from advocacy efforts, Rotary also makes extensive use of various IEC materials, such as comic books, video vans, banners and posters to publicize the cause of polio eradication. To keep the importance of Polio immunization alive in media and general, Rotary has organized different events involving celebrities from the sports and entertainment world and also hosted media briefings to promote the polio eradication program.
- Humanitarian organizations world over are partnering with Rotary International in their biggest humanitarian initiative to rid the world of Polio. In a major boost to the eradication campaign, the Gates Foundation contributed a whopping US \$ 355 million. Rotary International accepted to raise US \$ 200 million against the Gates Foundation grant by June 2012. Rotary help raise the matching grant exceeding the challenge to US \$ 228 million. Going forward, the Gates Foundation will match two-to-one, up to US \$ 35 million per year, every dollar Rotary commits to reduce the funding shortfall for polio eradication through 2020.

- Google.org, inspired by Rotary's efforts donated a sum of US \$ 3.5 million to the Polio eradication effort worldwide to Rotary Foundation. In India The Aditya Birla Group with its patron Smt. Rajashree Birla who is an honorary member of Rotary Club Mumbai has contributed US \$ 11 million. Ms. Usha Mittal (of Arcelor Mittal Group) has donated to Rotary a total contribution of USD 1.5 million towards Polio eradication fund. And Rtn. Harshad Mehta, Chairman of Rosy Blue Diamond has contributed more than US \$ 3.5 million.
- In January 2014, India completed three years without a case of Polio and along with 10 SEAR countries was awarded the Southeast Asia Regional Polio-free certification by WHO on 27 March 2014. India will complete six years of polio-free certification in March 2020.

### **Way forward: The last mile**

While the eradication of polio in India is a huge success, there is still ample work to be done to protect the hard-won ground to maintain a polio-free India. Globally, it's crucial to eliminate polio from the last three countries where it remains endemic and to keep other countries polio-free. If all eradication efforts stopped today, within 10 years, polio could paralyze as many as 200,000 children each year.

India's polio-free status can only be sustained through high-quality immunization campaigns and improved surveillance systems unless the disease is globally eradicated. The INPPC is now working to transition its extensive polio eradication knowledge and assets in India to support Government of India's public health goals such as measles and rubella elimination. An MOU was signed between the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, GOI and Rotary's INPPC with respect of the Polio Eradication Programme, Routine Immunization including Mission Indradhanush, Intensified Mission Indradhanush and Elimination of Measles and Rubella on 6 December 2017 in the office of the Honourable Health and Family Welfare Minister Mr. J.P. Nadda at Nirman Bhavan, New Delhi.